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RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0026
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0487
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000500

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS, IO/UNP, AND PM
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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PRELL](#) [BX](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: BRUNEI MAY DOWNSIZE PLANNED UNIFIL CONTRIBUTION

REF: BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 440 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Emil Skodon, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) As the original notion of a Indonesia-Malaysia-Brunei combined force contribution to UNIFIL fades away and is replaced by a more traditional pattern of separate but coordinated national contingents, the Government of Brunei (GOB) is looking at revising its planned contribution from a mechanized infantry company to (at least initially) a few medical personnel. This reconsideration is driven by a combination of factors: GOB nervousness about its capacity to carry out a PKO mission more robust than any it has undertaken before without the security blanket of a large combined force; a desire to scale its contribution to that of Malaysia to avoid contributing to any "loss of face" in Kuala Lumpur; and, the changing nature of the mission to be performed by the Malaysian national UNIFIL contingent to which the Bruneian military prefers to be attached. The implication for the USG is that there will be fewer Bruneian troops to potentially take advantage of USG-provided lift, and so a greatly diminished likelihood that the GOB would respond positively to any USG request that it pick up part of the tab for that lift. Should we wish to pursue such support from the GOB, Embassy recommends that we do so indirectly by quietly encouraging whatever ASEAN nation(s) might utilize USG assets for a UNIFIL deployment to approach the GOB independently for help in defraying the cost. End Summary.

BRUNEI RECONSIDERS ITS PLANNED FORCE CONTRIBUTION...

2. (C) As reported reftel, original GOB plans for a UNIFIL contribution called for an initial deployment of medical personnel, followed soon after by a mechanized infantry company as part of a combined Indonesian-Malaysian-Brunei force. Mid-level GOB military planners are continuing to work on that basis; we understand necessary vehicle modifications are being completed and they hope to be ready

for such a deployment within six weeks. However, the final "go" decision will be a political one made by the Sultan on advice of civilian leaders at the Ministries of Defense (MOD) and of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Over the past two weeks, our civilian contacts at those ministries have begun to emphasize only the initial contribution of a few medical personnel as part of a Malaysian contingent along with perhaps one or two military "observers," while downplaying the contribution of additional troops as something that could be done on an "as needed" basis but not until sometime in 2007.

...DUE TO CONCERNS ABOUT CAPABILITIES...

13. (C) Why the shift? From the time the Sultan of Brunei first committed to a UNIFIL contribution in a gesture of Islamic solidarity, some civilians in the MOD and MFAT appeared nervous about Brunei's ability to take on a PKO commitment more robust than any it had previously made. Those concerns were alleviated somewhat by the hope that embedding Bruneian troops in a combined southeast Asian force would allow the GOB contingent to piggyback on the greater capabilities of its larger neighbors, particularly the Malaysians, with whom GOB troops had already served in the International Monitoring Team in Mindanao. As the original idea of a tripartite force withered in the face of Israeli objections to Malaysian participation in UNIFIL, however, and it began to look as if the Bruneians might have to link up with an Indonesian force going to UNIFIL as a traditional national contingent, some of the initial nervousness about GOB capabilities has begun to return.

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...PLUS REGIONAL POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS...

14. (C) For the MFAT, the prospect of Brunei going to UNIFIL with the Indonesians while Malaysia was blackballed sparked a very southeast Asian worry about being seen to contribute, even indirectly, to a "loss of face" by one's friends -- especially a big, powerful, and sometimes grumpy friend in close proximity. MFAT Permanent Secretary Pengiran Dato Osman told Ambassador flatly that Brunei could not participate in UNIFIL if Malaysia was barred. He explained the GOB had to be "realistic" about its geopolitical position, and could not afford to be seen as tacitly going along with such a slight toward its much larger immediate neighbor. The Ambassador's protestation that Kuala Lumpur could hardly hold the GOB responsible for Tel Aviv's position had no impact on Osman, who insisted that there could be no sizeable deployment of Bruneian troops to UNIFIL without their Malaysian counterparts.

15. (C) The Ambassador subsequently raised this issue with Osman's boss, Foreign Minister II Lim Jock Seng, who took a less doctrinaire stance. In response to Ambassador's query, Lim said no Malaysian official had approached the GOB to ask that it not participate in UNIFIL if Malaysia was barred. Lim believed it would be politically acceptable for Brunei to deploy with Indonesia alone if need be, while adding the caveat that this would depend on the "military feasibility" of such a deployment. Lim noted that Brunei's military had focused on integrating tightly with Malaysian forces in a combined UNIFIL deployment, building on its Mindanao experience, and it could be difficult to change those plans to a deployment with Indonesia alone sans the Malaysians. He also confirmed that the GOB had not yet formally offered any UNIFIL contribution to the UN, thus implying that it was free to adjust its plans since no specific commitment had actually been made.

16. (C) Even taking Lim's statement at face value, it appears that planning to the military requirement would yield the same result as planning to Osman's perceived regional political requirement: a reduction in the GOB's contribution to UNIFIL. The reason is the changing size and nature of the parent Malaysian force to which GOB military planners prefer to attach their troops. Post understands that UNSYG Annan and Malaysian PM Abdullah reached agreement on a much smaller than planned Malaysian contribution to UNIFIL, composed of medical and logistics personnel. The originally envisaged GOB contribution of a mechanized infantry company makes less sense for that type of mission, and so a decision to scale back Bruneian participation to a few medical personnel now and "players to be named later" would constitute a sound military planning decision -- while also satisfying those GOB civilian leaders who worry about "showing up" the Malaysians, as well as those who were concerned about the robustness of the mission all along.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE USG

17. (C) However accurately we are or are not reading the complexities of GOB thinking, the bottom line is this: GOB civilian leaders are now considering a much more modest initial contribution to UNIFIL than originally foreseen, maybe less than a dozen troops as opposed to the mooted number of 200. An immediate implication for the USG is that there is correspondingly less rationale and incentive for the GOB to contribute to the cost of any USG-provided lift. This is particularly true since the original idea of a combined southeast Asian force has been replaced by the more traditional notion of national PKO contingents, and the

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Bruneian troops are more likely to attach to the smaller national contingent (Malaysia) that has less need for USG lift anyway.

18. (C) This is not to say that we cannot still encourage GOB financial support for the use of USG assets in a deployment to UNIFIL from southeast Asia. We can, but we need to be smart about it and do so indirectly. When it looked like a sizeable number of GOB troops might deploy on board USG assets as part of a combined force, it would have made sense for the USG to ask the Bruneians directly for help in paying the cost of that lift. In the current situation, however, that dog won't hunt. Chances of garnering GOB financial support for the deployment would be immeasurably improved if it could be arranged for such a request to come to the GOB from a brother ASEAN government -- presumably Indonesia, possibly Malaysia -- that wanted to move its UNIFIL forces via USG assets but could not afford the cost that remained after whatever the USG itself was able to pick up. Such an indirect strategy will be frustrating, since we will have less insight and control over the pace and direction of the process, but is more likely to produce a positive result than would rattling the tin cup on our own.
SKODON